

VZCZCXRO3819  
PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH RUEHTRO  
DE RUEHGO #0305 1230948  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 020948Z MAY 08  
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7456  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1098  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4645  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8186  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5748  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3621  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1500  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000305

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: FEAR AND CYNICISM IN KACHIN STATE

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (C) Summary: A leading Kachin peace negotiator told us the KIO remained officially neutral on the referendum, but recommended its members boycott. Officials from the regime and KIO met in late March to discuss logistics for the vote and to address specific KIO concerns. Younger KIO and KIA members were increasingly fearful the regime would disregard the ceasefire agreement and may consider violence if their concerns were not addressed. However, most Kachin were doubtful the referendum would change anything and remained more concerned with meeting their daily needs than politics. End Summary.

12. (C) Kachin peace negotiator Saboi Jum told Poloff the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) has publicly stated that while their own members would boycott the referendum, the Kachin people should decide for themselves what to do. He pointed out that remaining neutral on the vote was a direct rebuke to the regime, which he said has repeatedly urged the KIO to campaign in favor of a "yes" vote. In general though, Saboi Jum reported many in Kachin state remained cynical about the referendum and do not believe any change will come regardless of the result. Another Kachin businessman and philanthropist, Yup Zaw Hkawng, believed most regular people in Kachin state were too concerned with making ends meet to be interested in the referendum or politics in general. Both Saboi Jum and Yup Zaw Hkawng believed there was still little interest within Kachin state for a broad-based vote "no" campaign.

13. (C) Saboi Jum reported that on March 25, senior regime officials met with KIO leaders in Myitkyina. The regime's representatives assured the KIO that Than Shwe intended to honor the existing ceasefire agreement and would not force the KIO's military wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), to disarm. Regime officials agreed that no Burma Army soldiers or police would enter KIA-controlled areas during the referendum. Instead, the KIA would provide security at polling places. In exchange, the KIO agreed to allow regime representatives from military intelligence, immigration, and the referendum commission to be present at each polling station.

¶4. (C) Despite the regime's assurances, Saboi Jum said many Kachin remained concerned the regime would not honor the peace agreement and would eventually force the KIA to disarm.

In particular, he said younger members of the KIA were growing impatient with the regime's refusal to address any of their key concerns. Saboi Jum speculated that if progress was not made to address their fears, some of these members might consider resorting to violence, although he said this was unlikely in the near term. In order to avoid this, Saboi Jum believed the KIO's leadership must explain to their members how they plan to move forward after the referendum. He was vague about the KIO's plans, but speculated they would use the two years between the referendum and the 2010 elections to negotiate with the regime, "look for loopholes" in the constitution, and possibly lobby third countries and the international community for support.

¶5. (C) Comment: The fear of forced disarmament continues to loom over Kachin state, along with economic discontent and resentment of the regime's domination of the State's rich natural resources. Saboi Jum is one of several Kachin who have told us that the regime's refusal to address the concerns of many could lead to splintering within the KIO or even renewed fighting. Other ethnic minorities have also predicted that the constitution, without changes, could lead to more unrest. The regime may be confident it will win the May referendum, but long-term stability will be determined by how far the regime is willing to go to address the very real grievances of ethnic minorities. End Comment.

VILLAROSA